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remember that Our Freedom comes with a price. Thank goodness that we have such brave people willing to pay that price for us.

“The United States has an obligation to assist veterans of the Armed Forces in readjusting to civilian life. The Federal Government is also continuously concerned with building an effective work force, and veterans constitute a uniquely qualified recruiting source. It is, therefore, the policy of the United States and the purpose of this section to promote the maximum employment and job advancement opportunities within the Federal Government for qualified covered veterans who are qualified for such employment and advancement.”

[Section 4214(a)(1) of title 38, United States Code]



November Dates to Remember

- National American Indian Heritage Month
- National Alzheimer’s Awareness Month
- National Adoption Month
- Arab American Heritage Month
- 1 – All Saints’ Day (Christian)
- 2 – Day of the Dead (Mexico), Dia de Finades (Portugal), All Souls Day (Christian – Catholic)
- 3 – Bunka-no-Hi-Culture Day (Japan)
- 5 – Guy Fawkes Day (UK)
- 9 – World Freedom Day (USA)
- 11 – Veteran’s Day (USA) and Remembrance Day (Canada, UK)
- 10-13 – AgrAbility (Wichita, KS)
- 12 – Birthday of Baha’u’llah (Baha’i)
- 13 – International World Kindness Day (International), Guru Nanak’s Birthday (Sikh), Kathina (Buddhist) and Lokashah Jayanti (Jain)
- 15 – Shichi-Go-San (Japan) and Nativity Fast Begins (Christian – Orthodox)
- 16 – Louis Riel Day (Aboriginal/Native Canada)
- 20 – Transgender Day of Remembrance (USA)
- 23 – Kinro Kansha No Hi (Japan)
- 24 – Martydom of Guru Teg Bahadur (Sikh)
- 26 – Day of the Covenant (Baha’i)
- 27 – Thanksgiving Day (USA)
- 28 – Ascension of Abdu’l-Bahaj (Baha’i)
- 30 – St. Andrew’s Day (Scotland) and First Sunday of Advent (Christian)

November 7, 2008
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Louisiana State Civil Rights Committee Newsletter



LOUISIANA CIVIL RIGHTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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Remembering that Freedom is not Free this Veteran’s Day – November 11, 2008 – Submitted by David Williams, Veteran’s Program Emphasis Manager

According to information I found on Military Casualty Information, <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/castop.htm>, more than 30,000 troops serving in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the surrounding area have been wounded in action between October 2001 and February 2008. Most of these injuries include loss of limbs, blindness, hearing loss, burns, PTSD, and brain injuries. Some men and woman return home to find that their world has greatly changed. Simple task are now major undertakings. However, programs have been set up to help transition these heroes into civilian life.

The Operation Warfighter Program, sponsored by the Department of Defense, provides a temporary assignment/internship to military members as they are being treated in facilities within the National Capital Region. The program allows service members the ability to

look toward the future and develop job skills outside the hospital environment while recuperating. The program also allows the participating federal agencies to take advantage of the talents and devout dedication that these heroes possess.

The Supported Employment Program, handled through the Veterans Administration, assists disabled veterans in obtaining and maintaining employment. Services include counseling, assigned veteran/employer liaisons, and problem solving assistance. The program helps increase self-confidence and helps integrate the veteran back into community employment.

Although many more programs are available than the two just highlighted, the true support starts from home. Family, friends, and local communities often are required to provide the little extra boost to get these heroes going again. During this Veteran’s Day please

LOUISIANA
CIVIL RIGHTS
ADVISORY
COMMITTEE
MEETING

The next Louisiana State Civil Rights Committee Meeting will be on January 20, 2008 at 9:30 a.m. Committee meetings are held once every quarter the last Tuesday of the month: October, January, April and July. All NRCS employees are invited to attend. Minutes from each meeting are made available to all Louisiana NRCS employees.

CIVIL RIGHTS
COMMITTEE
MEMBER
Monthly Pick

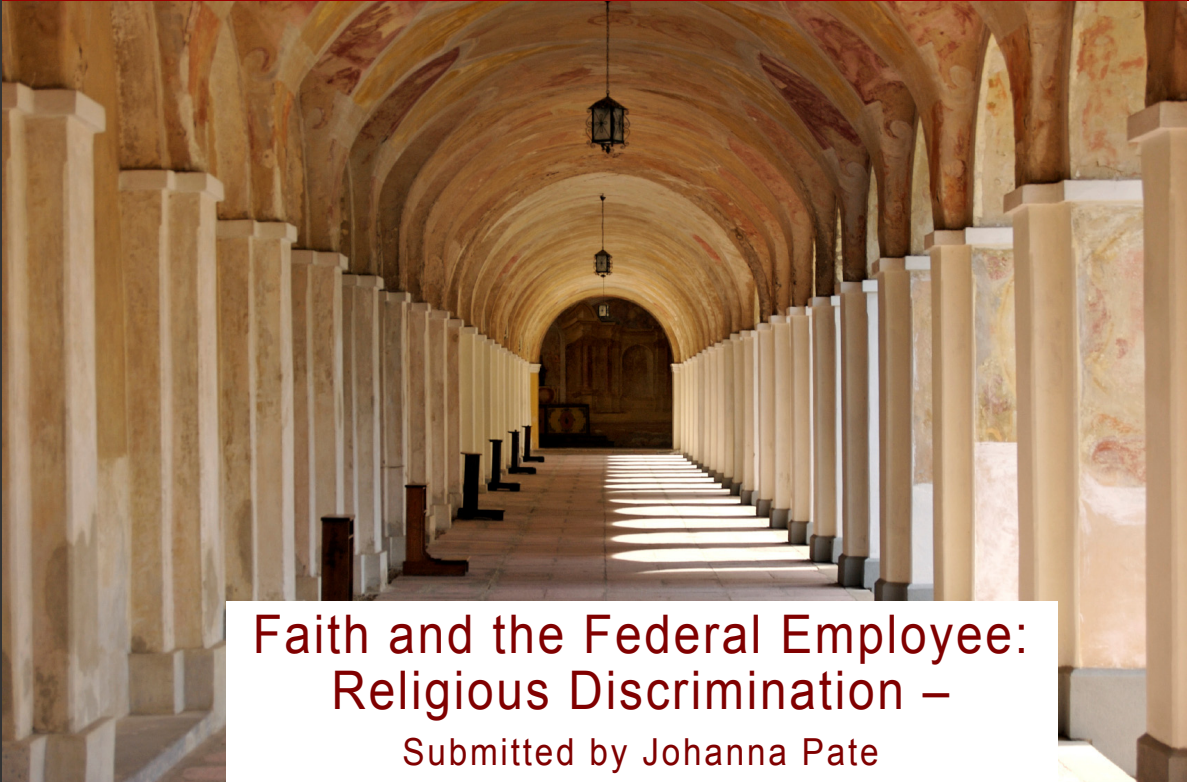


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Faith and the Federal Employee:
Religious Discrimination –
Submitted by Johanna Pate

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits employers from discriminating against individuals because of their religion in hiring, firing, and other terms and conditions of employment. Title VII covers employers with 15 or more employees, including state and local governments. It also applies to employment agencies and to labor organizations, as well as to the federal government.

Under Title VII:

- Employers may not treat employees or applicants more or less favorable because of their religious beliefs or practices – except to the extent a religious accommodation is warranted.
- Employees cannot be forced to participate or not participate in a religious activity as a condition of employment
- Employers must reasonably accommodate employees sincerely held religious practices unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on the employer. A reasonable religious accommodation is any adjustment to the work environment that will allow the employee to practice his religion. An employer might accommodate an employee's religious beliefs or practices by allowing: flexible scheduling, voluntary substitutions or swaps, job reassignments and lateral transfers, modification of grooming requirements and other workplace practices, policies and/or procedures.
- An employer is not required to accommodate an employee's religious beliefs and practices if doing so would impose an undue hardship on the employers' legitimate business interests. An employer can show undue hardship if accommodating an employee's religious practices requires more than ordinary administrative costs, diminishes efficiency in other jobs, infringes on other employees' job rights or benefits, impairs workplace safety, causes co-workers to carry the accommodated employee's share of potentially hazardous or burdensome work, or if the proposed accommodation conflicts with another law or regulation.
- Employers must permit employees to engage in religious expression, unless the religious expression would impose an undue hardship on the employer. Generally, an employer may not place more restrictions on religious expression than on other forms of expression that have a comparable effect on workplace efficiency.
- Employers must take steps to prevent religious harassment of their employees.

On August 14, 1997, new executive guidelines aimed at protecting religious exercise and religious expression was unveiled. These guidelines apply to all officials and employees in the Federal Workplace. These guidelines principally address employees' religious exercise and religious expression when the employees are acting in their personal capacity within the Federal workplace and the public does not have regular exposure to the workplace.

Expression in Private Work Area

Employees should be permitted to engage in private religious expression in personal work areas not regularly open to the public to the same extent that they may engage in nonreligious private expression, subject to reasonable content and viewpoint-neutral standards and restrictions: such religious expression must be permitted so long as it does not interfere with the agency's carrying out of its official responsibilities. For example:

- An employee may keep a Bible or Koran on their private desk and read it during breaks.
- An agency may restrict all posters, or posters of a certain size, in private work areas, or require that such posters be displayed facing the employee, and not on common walls; but the employer typically cannot single out religious or anti-religious posters for harsher or preferential treatment
- Employees are permitted to engage in religious expression with fellow employees, to the same extent that they may engage in comparable nonreligious private expression, subject to reasonable and content-neutral standards and restrictions: such expression should not be restricted so long as it does not interfere with workplace efficiency. Though agencies are entitled to regulate such employee speech based on reasonable predictions of disruption, they should not restrict speech based on merely hypothetical concerns, having little basis in fact, that the speech will have a deleterious effect on workplace efficiency.
- Employees can gather on their own time or prayer and Bible study in an empty conference room that employees are generally free to use on a first-come first-served basis.
- Employees are permitted to wear religious garb such as a crucifix or a head scarf, if wearing such during the work day is part of the employee's religious practice or expression.

To learn more about religious discrimination, visit the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission website at <http://www.eeoc.gov/types/religion.html>. To learn more about the executive guidelines on religious exercise and religious expression in the federal workplace, go to <http://clinton2.nara.gov/WH/New/html/19970819-3275.html>.

This Month's Q&A Civil Rights Tip

Q: Where is the policy and guidance located for theNatural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to ensure that employees and applicants for employment are not subjected to employment discrimination based on their race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age (40+), disability, retaliation (for prior participation in the equal employment opportunity complaint process), sexual orientation, marital or family status, political beliefs, parental status, and/or protected genetic information?

General Manual – Title 230 – Equal Opportunity



HOW TO HANDLE
AWKWARD MOMENTS

Despite our best efforts at cultural sensitivity, we may all expect to find ourselves, at one time or another, in an awkward moment with a customer or colleague. When you're not sure how to proceed, keep in mind that you probably won't offend a person from any culture if you:

- Act in a respectful manner
- Speak calmly using a friendly tone
- Smile, Nod, and warmly say hello during the initial introduction (but don't shake hands)
- Use a moderate amount of eye contact (but don't stare)
- Call and refer to the person by their title and last name (until they invite you to do otherwise)
- Let that person determine the proximity for the conversation (i.e., the personal space)
- Let that person determine the proximity for the conversation (i.e., the personal space)
- Let your hand gestures be natural, but relatively calm
- Avoid touching the person with whom you are conversing, especially if the person is of the opposite sex
- Offer to assist someone who might need it, then wait for the offer to be accepted.

If, during a conversation, you sense that you have offended someone or if you reach an awkward moment, consider trying the following:

- Apologize simply and graciously, and then move on
- Admit that you are unsure how to proceed, and ask for assistance or guidance.
- Try to avoid the following:
- "Making a big scene" (e.g., profuse, loud apology repeated over and over)
- Making a joke out of a situation
- Ignoring a situation
- Showing disrespect toward any person
- *Some mild, self-directed humor might be appropriate and help lighten certain situations. However, remember that not all minds think alike when deciding what's funny.

BOTTOM LINE: Successful cross-cultural communication requires you to remain alert and respectful throughout the entire conversation. If you do, your likelihood of success will outweigh your need to know how to handle the rare awkward situation